Star Trek: The Measure of Men Essay

Was there a particular way of knowing that was most important in the decision about whether Data was the property of Starfleet? If so or if not, tell us why and how.

In The Measure of Men, an episode of Star Trek: The Next Generation, the crew of the Enterprise find themselves in a tricky situation when one of the crew members, Data the android, is told by a man called Bruce Maddox that he is to be forcibly made part of an experiment to try and make other, similar androids. This leads to a hearing where it is debated whether or not Data is the property of Starfleet and so if he can be forced to leave the Enterprise. Data is being represented by Captain Piccard and Maddox is being represented, reluctantly, by Commander Riker and Captain Louvois is holding the hearing. Here the different Ways of Knowing used by the opposing sides in the trial will be discussed and, hopefully, a conclusion will be reached about which one, if any, was the most important and why.

A lot of Riker’s opening argument is based around sense perception. He takes off Data’s arm to show the wiring underneath, he has Data perform tasks that no ordinary human would be able to do (bending extremely strong materials), and, ultimately, he switches Data off. This is all meant to get the others to realise that Data is a man-made machine, not a person, and should therefore be treated as such. He does this by *showing* everyone how Data is physically different to them, i.e. sense perception. In retaliation, Piccard also uses sense perception in his case. In particular, he brings out some of Data’s personal items which he keeps for purely sentimental reasons, like his medals, a gift from Piccard and a hologram of a woman with which he was “intimate”. Contrary to Riker, he’s trying to prove the point that Data thinks and feels like man does and so he cannot be “owned” like some kind of common household appliance. Similarly to Riker, he *shows*, through physical means, how Data is capable of being more than a mere machine. This also links into a second Way of Knowing, emotion.

A lot of Piccard’s argument is based on emotion, as it involves proving that Data has emotion, and is therefore a complex life form that should not be owned or treated as property as well as trying to provoke an emotional response from the others so as to convince them to side with Data. As mentioned before, he gives examples of items that Data keeps only because they make him feel emotions, like happiness. At another point in the episode, Whoopi Goldberg’s character gives a heartfelt speech to Piccard about how, if Data gets copied, he will become disposable and disposable people get mistreated, like the slaves. Captain Picard later adapts some of these ideas into his argument. This particular kind of speech is meant for an emotional reaction.

Language is also an integral part of the hearing. Riker, during his opening statement, uses a lot of technical language and jargon to get his point across, that Data was a machine. He refrains from using emotional language, partly because it wouldn’t have been an appropriate way to prove his point but also probably because he is still reluctant to argue against Data, whom he considers to be his friend. On the other hand, Piccard tends to be more emotional with his language. He also uses a lot of TOK language as he speaks about some of the moral and ethical issues involved in the debate like what exactly constitutes sentience.

However, the most important Way of Knowing in the decision about whether or not Data was the property of Starfleet is reason. Both sides of the hearing use reason to a massive extent so as to prove their respective points, and it is with reason that the battle is finally won. Striker tries to use reason when saying that since Data was created by a man and can be shut down by a man (as he himself demonstrates), he should be controlled by men. Piccard also uses reason to a great extent in his statements, particularly when he’s proving that Data is a sentient being and when he’s discussing with Maddox the implications if a race of androids were created and how it would impact the reputation and livelihood of human beings. All these, including some of the other points that have been mentioned before, are rational arguments steeped in reason first and foremost, and matters of sense perception, emotion and language are secondary. Therefore, reasoning is the most important way of knowing in this particular example.